THE END OF THE UNIVERSE, PART XVI: BEAUTIFUL WHATABOUTISM ('CLIMATE CHANGE')

What about beautiful whataboutism. Children speak to the size of the universe. Pure declaratives. Adults fail, again. Žižek the little girl. Naw. Greta in the body of the United Nations. Naw naw naw.

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Howey Ou, Chinese climate dissident, Gulin, China, @howey_ou tw, 24 May 2019.

UNIVERSES CAN ALSO GO EXTINCT

In the now prohibited 2019 Russia Today (RT) video called 'Slavoj Žižek on kids who protest climate change. How to Watch the News', Žižek spoke about the child climate dissidents who followed in the wake of Greta Thunberg's initial 2018 school protest. He described the 'madness' of a situation in which the 'only voices of reason' were those of young school children. This was an actual madness, he implied, and it meant that adults literally didn't know what they were saying and doing anymore; they had literally stopped thinking; they had stopped being able to ask very basic questions; they had cut themselves off from any access to objective wisdom; and it was down to children in that moment to hold civilization to account. [1]

Even if kids cannot do this holding to account in a sustained way, the very idea of Kids (Greta Thunberg or her Chinese equivalent Howey Ou) can as if *state* what we analyzed in previous parts: that *they, those in charge, those above, have nothing better to do than to do*. 'The kids' offer no popular wisdom or new philosophy. They simply *declare* as last or first resort. Or even better and worse still, they say: *how do we even know what is last and first resort? How do we even know what a last resort is? What is the order of things and doing in time, now?*

THE SIZE OF THE UNIVERSE

The children say, and here is a reading cue:

> *we do not yet know what size universe we are in*

Or:

> *we do not yet know what size universe we are in and so we do not yet know how we can say this or that at all*

Or:

> *a universe can also go extinct*

Howey Ou, 'Brandenburger Tor', Berlin, howey_ou ig, Germany, 29 January 2021.

These comments (what this series calls 'reading cues') are a philosophy and they are not a philosophy. They are the origin of philosophy and also of what was once called 'socialism', and they are also none of this. Since nothing can be saved, perhaps we can save the declarative questioning of an experienceless 'language', and this 'language' is the 'language' of 'the kids'. It is not a mere madness but an *actual madness* that children must say this. *Because all adults are now mad.*

SCHOOL STRIKES

The school strikes that took place in the wake of Greta's actions in 2018 were perhaps the most radical strikes we can imagine because they questioned and struck against the very idea of school, learning, and what there is to say and to do. While 'adult' graduates are even now keen on the idea of 'defending the humanities', securing pensions for lecturers, setting up new institutions, galleries, yet more journals, and so on, the childrens' school strikes triggered by Greta in 2018 simply disbanded the human need to be at school in the first place, because the future, and therefore the future of doing, is more than in question. This being more-than-in-question is also more and less than a question and it has to be more than that still: it has to be like the language of the *Cs* and *Ds* previously explored.

Here are some examples of 'questions' asked by the young climate protesters around that time, starting with one of Greta's formulations. All of them are ways of declaring, being declared, and saying nothing:

> *And why should I be studying for if future that soon [sic] will be no more when no one is doing anything whatsoever to save that future? And what is the point of learning facts in the school system, when the most important facts, given by the finest science of that same school system, clearly means nothing to our politicians and our society?*

And:

> *What's the point in learning if it's not going to do anything because your future is going to be ruined by climate change?—Danny, 14*

And:

> *The reason I go to school is so I can have a future. If I don't come here then I'm not going to have a future anyway, so this is more important for me at the moment.—Layla, 16*

And:

> *They're messing up our future and we're the ones who are going to have to clean it up, so I think it's important that we come and tell them about it. The school haven't let us go, they*

> *say there's consequences but it's more important than school attendance to come here and protest.—Lana, 13*

And:

> *My head of year said no this time but I think it is more important to come. I think I'm going to get into trouble though.—Toni, 15*

And:

> *Why go to school when the world is burning and people are dying?—Zane, 10*

And:

> *For my birthday I asked everyone to come here today, we won't have a future if we don't act now.—Hannah, 18*

It is too easy and too simple to dismiss these questions as too easy and too simple, and it is too easy to not see what the questions actually are in their striking simplicity: a beautiful and pure whataboutism. Being (the future) is to be distinguished from beings (school, art, careers) and this is the real form of the question that is maintained by 'the kids'. This is the new war front through which everything goes. We should not defend the humanities, in other words, we should dismantle them. We should defund the humanities. We should allow their defunding to take place. We should unlearn.

Howey Ou, howey_ou ig, 22 April 2020. Earth Day Protest.

As Greta almost says, what is the point in 'facts' when we already have all the 'facts' we need? What is there to be taught when teaching presupposes something that does not need to be taught since it is known and must be carried by teachers who now know less than those they teach? Žižek notes that it is the force of Greta's speech to deconjure the adult objection that 'no, it is more complicated than that' or 'okay, you are right, but unfortunately we are not going to be able to do anything'. This 'adult objection' can be made into a sort of negative reading cue:

> *no, it is more complicated than that, unfortunately we are not going to be able to do anything, everyone knows this*

Somewhere in speech or cognition—in our assumptions—it is as if this negative reading cue is guiding everything, especially our reactions on the question of 'human extinction'. The child's natural reaction is cross-circuited. The child's knowledge of everything is emptied out. The child arrives at school but is bored in every sense. The child as such is exhausted by the negative reading cues—in effect, the child is exhausted by being read badly by a school that wishes to teach how to read. What we

know, simply, is that school of any kind is *the* negative reading cue. Knowledge is hatred and exhaustion. Age has no independent existence. There is no teaching.

And so we can say:

> *dare to be simple enough to think this*

Or:

> *dare to be simple enough to allow the distractions to be as they are and think this again*

This negative assumption is, in some ways amazingly, always a logical step taken and yet missed out in most accounts of the present. Most accounts of the present act as if this assumption has not been made and yet all the time draw on this assumptive jump for their very existence. This assumption is the heart of all activations of the demonic in the present. And yet nowhere is it taught, cultivated, taken by the hand. The 'adults' who have made this jump are unable to tell you it is there.

ADULTING (COUNTER-MATURITY AT AN END OF AN UNIVERSE)

We need to be clear that this is probably true: nothing will happen. These school kids can say what they want but in gross terms:

> *nothing will happen*

We will all die. Nothing will happen. We will go extinct on whatever scale needs to happen. Nothing will happen. Nature knows best. Grow up.

But we also need to be clear that just this is precisely what this speech of the children is saying best of all and that the speech of adults is no longer in a position to say this to them, to this other speech, unless it is the adult who is prepared to adopt the position of childhood speech by analyzing it and not just covering it with a name. The question is not whether the school strikes worked or did not work, for example back in 2018 and 2019, *but just how much they did not work!* If they did not work at all—if they did not do anything at all—then all the better, since this confirms what the children were saying. That nobody is doing anything. That nobody can do anything. And that this is never taught.

this is never taught.

BADIOU

The possibility the child strikers created, even if they ended up doing nothing, was the possibility of ***not covering a truth***. Alain Badiou says that it is just here that the greatest oppression takes place, in what he calls 'covering'. The event of a child's speech takes place (why is nobody (anyone) (not) doing anything, they have nothing better to do than to do, the affirmative, the pure declarative) and the first impulse, even if we believe in it, is to cover it. To cover here means to suppress the event. To shut it down. But really, at this stage it's much more brutal than that: the natural knowledge of the child is almost entirely scolded away in a silent assumption about social relations and their predominance in a moment when they have necessarily been emptied out, whether the adult child chooses to see this or not. That it is more complicated than that (distraction, analysis, learning) is the primary form of social coercion.

Here is another reading cue:

> *all knowledge is always already the love poem of the entire universe*

Or:

> *children (us) get tired because all knowledge is always already the love poem of the entire universe and this is constantly denied*

Anyone who does not make this love poem of the entire universe available to you immediately is your 'enemy', we might say. You can have a complicated theory of the enemy all you want but this theory will then simply block your own innate knowledge that all knowledge is always already the love poem of the entire universe. A complicated theory of the enemy will then have blocked the universal love poem. It will have blocked and abandoned the universe itself. It will have blocked the future horizon of all truth events in a universe of love. This is the real meaning of suppression.

'COVERING' THE TRUTH OF EXTINCTION

There are thousands of ways in which this covering of universal love poems can happen. And as we have seen this is what constantly happens to Ripley in the *Alien* films, such that she has to wait till the other adults have gone so that she can direct her active speech to the xenomorph. If Newt survives in the air ducts, it seems to be so that she can know how *not* to cover the truth, and this is an exacting activity. It is after all—however contradictory this may sound in the midst of a discussion of statements of futurelessness—a question of infinities. The ability to be open to the truth of death, the truth of death as extinction, the truth of extinction as death, as and of these two as radically different from each other, is the ability to not cover over the new infinity of a truth event that often looks like a declarative that can be easily 'covered'. These questions and statements of the school children are infinite truth events. Blind to the future, and yet infinitely open, experienceless in the simple sense of not knowing where they will land, and yet real.

Here are some cues we may choose to learn and unlearn:

> *the reality of extinction as a truth-event being covered again and again*

And:

> *the reality of the event of covering itself*

And:

> *is extinction a new axiom of infinity?*

And:

> *impossible to decide anything if we rely only on data, rather than the open intelligence of infinities*

DECIDING INFINITIES (AGAIN)

Badiou introduces the concept of 'covering' to name the ways in which the operations of finitude 'cover' the real and new infinities in the (mathematical) 'situation', persuading us that there is never anything new. *Yes, I hear what the children say, but it's*

more complicated than that. Even if it really is more complicated than that (part of the assumption), the statement that it is more complicated than that tends to be made as if before the original statement (by the child, or little girl for example) has been made. By uncovering the operation of covering, Badiou is revealing an operation that is the very form of the worst repression in the world: the advance killing of infinities, whether they be infinities of finitude or of infinitude. This killing is the micrological violence of not listening to speech as soon as (before) it happens.

Ripley's nosebleed in *Alien* (1979).

Ripley is repeatedly exposed to the violence of covering. When she finds out that the simple truth ('crew expendable') has been kept from her, even though this was something she knew via intuition, she breaks down all the way: eventually blood streams from both nostrils. A nosebleed becomes something more terminal.

THE PRESENT (‘TRUMP’)

Let us scale out, and say that ‘covering’ is the dominant and often most hard to see form of many of the most ‘spectacular’ events of repression in the world. Take what Steve Bannon called ‘the trial of the century’ in 2020, that is, the first impeachment of Donald Trump. In many ways simply a show trial, this event also contained within it deeper themes that constitute any public and ideological space now and which are felt and registered by what we have been calling the icon of ‘the little girl’ (Greta, Antigone, and so on).

We propose two perhaps extraordinary things here in conjunction: 1. that Trump was a little girl, and 2. that Trump took the role in this first impeachment case of the soldier Dreyfus in the anti-Semitism affair that Proust loved to describe. What is constantly being covered is the way we covered and missed Donald Trump, and what is most difficult to see and say is the way he is, in fact, still an innocent compared to the system of covering as such. This will take some saying and doing, since for many the opposite seems to be the case. Whatever Trump does or says, he is and was the devil. He is and was the definition of what is wrong. He is and was the one to be impeached, even if laws are suspended to do so and even when he is absent. In all of this, the truth-event of ‘Trump’ has ongoingly risked being completely covered over. Even a child can understand that it is unlikely that one man, and one man alone, could be the cause of the ‘evil’ that America continues to symbolize in the world. A child may know how to hate Trump, but a child may also be wrong. When it comes to Trump, perhaps everything is covered. Even before the Alex Jones super precedent of covering in 2022, there was the Trump precedent. The greatest scapegoating mechanism the world has ever seen.

The most legally disturbing Anglo-American instance of ‘covering’ is perhaps the bill of attainder, that is, the idea that someone can be prosecuted or impeached without due process. Before the child opens their mouth, they are impeached (by an assumption). Greta goes on the street to sit and deconstruct the very idea of school, but before she has set off, she is impeached and assumed to be something else. The moment of repression here is not after but before. As many commentators said at the time, the decision to impeach Trump took place before he won the presidency. In

banal terms, the Clinton cadre payed for the Steele dossier to be put together as a kind of 'insurance policy' in the event of Trump winning. Before Newt is allowed to tell the soldiers they too will die, she finds herself nowhere near the map table, peering through the arms and legs of the adults to try and get a view. The suspension of the chance for truth events to take place in the human space is perhaps worse than the extinction of all conditions for truth events to take place at all, precisely because the former is the cause of the latter. We can have no truth events and a world, but not no world and truth events. Whether we call this 'impeachment', 'covering' or 'going back to school', it remains the same operation. An operation that is more and more one, one alone. A single machine. And therefore more and more powerful and hard to skip.

THE VERY WORST ASSUMPTION

We can simplify:

> *the covering of infinities is the worst, there is no other worst it can be compared with (this is the news of the last holocaust, the killing off of any final trace of human life in a sizeless universe)*

It is impossible not to say that to some degree Trump's strange facility with language, for example on Twitter, resembled the language work of Greta and Newt and Lucia and Fred. All five are autist artists in language. Trump loved the impolite exclamation point! So does Greta. Blah! Blah! Blah! We may distinguish between them all, of course. That's what adults do—they distinguish. But the language power of a 'language' that appeals directly to the non-question of a usually covered-over truth is the main thing going on here. And it's the same. You may not like it, but this is how it is: Trump is a little girl and this is why 'we' have hated him. More so than Greta, more so than Newt, and perhaps even more so than Antigone, Trump says what one is not supposed to stay. And, on the world stage, he is covered in shit for doing so. In fact, by 2022 he is nowhere to be seen. If one doesn't believe that Trump has already been assassinated, one really doesn't understand the killing power of the cover.

GRETA AND TRUMP IN THE BODY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Žižek speaks in the video about Greta of the 'complex mechanisms we have to cancel

taking the ecological threat seriously', that is, what Badiou simply calls 'covering'. It is the adult world that is in charge of these mechanisms. Žižek adds that the mechanisms are 'perverted'. We claimed in recent history, for example, to hate Trump, but what we really wanted was the low-level sexualizable pleasure of holding over an available hate of Trump to distract us from both personal pain and the pain of a generalized (possible) end of the (a) world. We blamed Trump for everything because we enjoy blame as a framework-narrative, and to blame him or the United States for something else is too simple and obvious and, at the same time, too hard and complex. We cover one event to cover another, and to cover ourselves, and to cover the perverseness of how we actually take our pleasures. In the meanwhile, let Greta be the one who knows. But simply hating Trump was no better or worse than simply forgetting Greta's name because we love her totally and agree with her but hate ourselves too much to say so. Both, again, are positions of subtle and perverse covering. Where what Greta's voice offers is no cover at all, we immediately cover it over by making her an object-voice *over there*. She is too like Antigone to be loved. What Lacan called the 'splendor of Antigone' wasn't necessarily the beauty of a young girl. When Trump actually presented a potential variant in the recent history of neo-conservative American foreign policy, we impeached him (now in the most general sense) to cover over the fact and to cover over the fact of just that history of foreign aggression. Perhaps when Trump ghosted Greta in the United Nations building in New York it was because they could not entertain a dialogue because they are exactly the same. Absolute autism cannot touch absolute autism. Eventually, Newt's voice collapses into Ripley's in *Alien Resurrection*. The child tears the adult's hand away from its body and grows up retarded and invisibly beautiful:

Greta Thunberg and Donald Trump in the lobby of the United Nations H.Q. in New York in September 2019, after her 'how dare you' speech.

Žižek goes on to say what really needs to be said, that the 'innocent gaze' of the child has a power because it goes against and disproves the wisdom that 'the first look at something is usually deceptive'. Instead of having to look again after this first look (dialectics, loss of innocence), Žižek suggests that 'if history confirms or proves anything, it's that the opposite is true'. Children, he says, 'have this first innocent gaze'—if we don't do something we are doomed—and our entire ideological superstructure is arranged to deny away this gaze, which is essentially the gaze of the absolute. One might put this simply and say it is the tyranny of dialectics or even the fascism of the second look that constitutes 'covering' as such.

Newt knew everything the crew needed to know, as did Ripley in her own way in the first film, when she refused to ignore quarantine regulations that proscribed allowing the xenomorph onboard. The signature of the human here is, once again, covering. It is not so much that the human tends to 'cover', but that the virus of 'covering' the first gaze of childhood tends to find itself structured as the human. The human is itself the cleft made (a life) when the absolute (warning: crew expendable) is ignored. The human is an aversion to its own seeing through. To return to Moten, isn't it true that he gives the key to all this in *All That Beauty*? The act of not-covering is for Moten the act of learning to see through. '*Naw*', he says, '*we gotta learn to see through things*'. The 'naw' here is really beautiful. Think about it. It's a naw that works around the edges of dialectics as a global covering, and worries them away cooly. This is what Newt was saying: naw, affirmative. This is what Greta's 'how dare you' means and her 'blah blah blah'. All of this means: naw. When Newt is lifted onto the map table, she really doesn't look at it, because she doesn't have to. She knows/she naws (Newt naws) what's on the map table. And for Moten it goes both ways: *Gotta learn to love being seen*

through.

So:

(0[naw]1)

gotta love to learn to be seen through

The first thing you can do, then, like a little girl who isn't just that, is uncover covering; you can learn to love seeing through and being seen through. And you can relate this to the absolute—to this absolute in good time. The absolute of a final holocaust to come that has to be stated and declared as such, to be counted and then (non)computed, to be seen through. Otherwise, the whole mechanism of covering gets in the way of you even seeing all this, or rather, even when you get into uncovering covering, then you just start getting in the way and you can't even see it, any of it. You get in the way of everyone and they can't see through you to the other side or to the truth, what Ray Brassier once called, very simply, *the truth of extinction*. *Naw*, we say. *Naw, naw, see through*.

In some ways, each step we have to take has to be a step about being Newt, a step about remembering Greta, a step about recalling Lucia Diego, a step about seeing about Fred, a naw, a hatching, a map table, an air duct, a punch, a pinch, a refusal to vore. It's simple: everything's gone and everything's going. Everything's wrong and everything's in the way. Everyone has forgotten and nothing is left. And saying that is not nihil (philosophy, men, hard work, a headache, and so on) but the answer of quantic the little girl. Why is anyone doing that. Why are you not fucking getting out of the way. Why don't you shut up for a minute. And, even, why don't you shut up for a minute because it's all over for the 'me' right now, and why don't you shut the fuck up a minute because it might not be and I can't see either way. If everything is being covered and then covered by everyone being so into their own uncovering, then how the fuck do you know either way which the truth event will be? Is extinction as truth coeval with a new immortality? Are either of these truths a cover? Both? Neither? When will you see it through?

Moten savs all this when he savs:

> *Every photograph is a photograph of that, which an actual photograph of that makes deafeningly clear.*

This means there is only one word, and there is only one thing to say. When Beckett said at the very end 'What is the word', that is what he was asking. (Declaring.) At the same time, he was wrong to ask *what is the word*, he might have just said, *this is the word*. And also, he did. That is the word. The same photograph. Naw. Affirmative. Shut up. Same difference. All over. And so on. If it is the same photo, then you have to see it there even when the bill of attainder or Alex Jones precedent is triggered as a visible and American political figure of just how far *covering* has gone. [2] If we go back to Greta time and again, it's to remember what she said before she first said it. And what we felt and thought, before we went back to school and got it all wrong.

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1 (To hold the fort? For us? Civilizational fort: while the adults are away, the kids, playing, are at least here. They are present. They are declarative. (They shun the remote fort-da.))

2 How far? All the way to extinction. No image of Palestine (Daney). No image of extinction. We can add, no real image of the Jew. The Jew drags herself down into the abyss of Palestine, a second and third and then final holocaust.

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